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- (1) LDP's Koga, Tanigaki factions to merge today

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
May 13, 2008

Two factions in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) -- one headed by Election Committee Chairman Makoto Koga and the other one chaired by Policy Research Council Chairman Sadakazu Tanigaki -- will today hold a party to formally announce their merger. The two factions were derived from the Kochikai (a faction formed by Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda in 1957). They will reunite for the first time in eight years, having broken apart over the so-called Kato rebellion in the fall of 2000, in which former LDP Secretary General

Koichi Kato called on then Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori to step down. The merged faction will have 61 members, bringing it close to the second largest Tsushima faction. Although the faction will aim to regain the power once held by the prestigious Kochikai, known for its liberal policies, it has yet to reach a consensus as to whom it will file as a candidate for the party's next presidential election. There is an icy view in the faction that it is anachronism to show political presence using the numbers of faction members.

Koga, who will head the new faction, told senior members on the night of May 7 at a Japanese restaurant in Tokyo: "It is good that we will be able to return to the place where we once were. Let us make united efforts to overcome our difficult situation!"

Kochikai has produced four prime ministers since it was formed in 1957. Although it has led Japan's postwar politics, along with the former Tanaka faction (currently the Tsushima faction), its political presence weakened due to its breakups. The merger notion was once before floated but then disappeared. The notion was propelled forward with one stroke because Koga and Tanigaki jointly backed Yasuo Fukuda in the party leadership race last September.

The merger of the 15 membership of the Tanigaki faction and the 46 membership of the Koga faction involves the risk that the Tanigaki faction may lose its political momentum. Despite that, the merger will still give Tanigaki an assurance he can secure at least 20 supporters, the number required to run in a presidential election. Tanigaki could not run for the 2006 election because he had failed to obtain 20 recommendees. A senior Tanigaki faction member said: "The merger is a preparatory step for Mr. Tanigaki to run in the next presidential race."

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Meanwhile, Koga appears to be aiming to gain the political initiative built on numbers. Support for Tanigaki to run for the presidential election cannot be found in the Koga faction. The Koga faction, however, has not found a presidential candidate of its own. Koga has indicated the possibility of cooperating with (the Aso faction), telling persons close him: "Former Secretary General Taro Aso is a person whom I can entrust matters at ease."

A junior Machimura faction member made this critical comment on the merger of the two factions: "Now is the time when politics is decided mainly by policies. I am concerned that such a merger will give the public the impression that the LDP remains unchanged." A mid-level Koga faction member also said: "When the party itself is about to go down to ruin, it is no good for a faction to pick a party president."

(2) Goal to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 60 PERCENT -80 PERCENT by 2050 takes on life on its own

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
May 13, 2008

It was learned on May 12 that the government is undergoing coordination with the possibility of incorporating a goal of cutting global warming greenhouse gases by 60 PERCENT -80 PERCENT by 2050 as part of the "Fukuda Vision," which is to be released in mid-June. Given the fact that measures to combat greenhouse gases will become a main item of the G-8 Toyako Summit agenda, Japan, as the host nation, wants to take the lead in discussion, by indicating its own policy in advance.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda will call in Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura, Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura, Economy, Trade and Industry Policy Minister Akira Amari possibly before the end of this week and order them to launch a full-fledged effort to set Japan's own goal and undertake the necessary coordination.

Machimura during a press conference on the afternoon of the 12th stressed the meaning of setting a long-term goal: "It is necessary for Japan to clarify its stand in the run-up to the G-8. It is meaningful for Japan to come up with its goal to be achieved by 2050 as part of such efforts."

It is imperative for Prime Minister Fukuda to come up with tangible results at the G-8, since he failed to use Chinese President Hu Jintao's Japan visit to buoy up his administration. It appears that in order to make his presence felt, as well, he decided to come up with a similar policy to that of European countries regarding setting a goal of cutting greenhouse gases, an issue that is viewed as the key to a successful G-8 meeting. However, since a reduction goal was revealed before full coordination was carried out with industrial circles, the percentage alone has taken on life on its own, making it difficult to carry out the actual work.

Is the goal attainable?

Concerning a long-term goal of cutting greenhouse gases, then Prime Minister Abe at the Heiligendamm Summit held in Germany last year proposed the Cool Earth 50 aimed at halving carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions throughout the world from the present level. Prime Minister Fukuda during the plenary session of the World Economic

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Forum (Davos Conference) in February this year noted that the government would tackle global warming by setting country-specific reduction goals.

The European Union (EU) has already come up with a goal of cutting greenhouse gases emitted by industrialized countries as a whole by 60 PERCENT -80 PERCENT from the 1990 level. Japan's National Institute for Environmental Studies has released a report noting that there is a technical potential of achieving a 70 PERCENT cut, compared with the 1990 level. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) takes the position, "70 PERCENT could become one guideline," as one official source said.

Japan as the host nation of the G-8 is in a position of urging developing countries, such as China and India, whose economy is notably growing, to cut their CO2 emissions. As such, if Japan does not display leadership, it will not be able to exercise its authority regarding global warming greenhouse gas emissions cuts, according to the same source.

Loophole

In the meantime, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is alarmed about the move, because it means further energy-saving investment for industry circles with one connected source saying, "We have had trouble since Japan accepted a 6 PERCENT CO2 reduction obligation under the Kyoto Protocol without any way to meet such a goal. There is a possibility of Japan experiencing the same trouble this time."

For this reason, some are of the opinion that Japan should ease the reduction goal, using the present emissions level, which is higher than the 1990 level, the base year. One senior government official has indicated his perception that Japan should adopt a legally non-binding target.

Another task is to set a mid-term goal. The EU has set a goal of cutting emissions by more than 20 PERCENT by 2050, compared with the 1990 level. The U.S. has also come up with a mid-term goal of halting the increase in CO2 emissions by 2025, and then turning emissions volume downward. Japan alone has yet to come up with a mid-term goal.

However, METI is reluctant to set such a goal with a ministry source saying, "Unless a mid-term goal is attached with a condition that it should be adopted after energy-saving technology is developed, efforts to cut emissions would not make steady progress." The ministry insists that fiscal measures are necessary. Machimura also stressed during a press conference on the 12th: "Japan will hold final talks on a specific percentage late next year. It is premature to come up with a mid-term goal now."

Discord at Kantei

Machimura in a speech given on the 10th for the first time revealed

the government's policy of mapping out the Fukuda Vision.

Machimura said, "The government is preparing to release the Fukuda Vision including measures to combat global warming greenhouse gases. If possible, we would like Prime Minister Fukuda to release Japan's reduction goal."

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The announcement was a bolt from the blue for the Kantei. One aide to the prime minister has already expressed dissatisfaction with Machimura, complaining who was this Fukuda in the Fukuda Vision. This is because the Kantei had intended to show the prime minister's leadership, revealing its future approach to related cabinet ministers before the end of the week. However, Machimura exposed the plan first, as one government source noted. The episode has underscored the distance between the prime minister and Machimura.

METI, which is expected to be urged to undergo coordination with business circles, is perplexed at the move with a source related to it saying, "We have yet to map out a menu for cutting CO₂ emissions by 60 PERCENT -80 PERCENT. Percentage alone is going ahead of itself. We do not know whether it is possible to really pile up results."

(3) Editorial: Political decision needed to ban cluster bombs

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Abridged)

May 13, 2008

International negotiations to ban cluster munitions, which kill and wound civilians indiscriminately, will now enter the final stage. The Oslo Process, where the states that agreed to ban cluster bombs are addressing the work of producing a treaty to prohibit such munitions, is to hold its last international conference in Dublin, Ireland, on May 19. The conference is to adopt a draft treaty, which is expected to be signed by the member states in December.

Warfare occurred in Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, and Lebanon in 2006. Cluster bombs were used in these wars, and as a result, the number of civilian casualties has been increasing. Civilians need to be protected from such harmful weapons. Weapons that give the victims unnecessary pain must be prohibited. This principle by international law needs to be applied to cluster munitions. We must not miss an opportunity to end the absurdity that innocent children and adults are being killed by cluster munitions. The draft treaty still has some points at issue to be further discussed, for instance, whether to completely ban cluster bombs or to allow exceptions. We urge participating states to resolve to create a powerful treaty as an international standard.

The Mainichi Shimbun has repeatedly called on the Japanese government to agree to a ban on cluster munitions under the Oslo Process. This past February, Japan finally signed the Political Declaration stipulating that a treaty banning cluster bombs be established by the end of this year. Regrettably, however, Japan is not in a position to lead negotiations on such a treaty.

Japan officially gave its approval in an international conference to a ban on cluster munitions. So it is strange for Japan to contend that possessing such bombs is justifiable.

For example, Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba said that Japan "will possess as a deterrent" cluster bombs and explained: "In the case of using them, we will evacuate civilians first, and then, after perfectly verifying that no unexploded bombs are left, we will allow residents to come back." But is it possible to evacuate civilians in the midst of combat? Is it possible to completely remove unexploded bombs?

The U.S. forces dropped cluster bombs in the Vietnam War. Unexploded

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cluster bombs that are still there cause casualties even now.

Countries possessing cluster bombs have never dropped them in the soil of their own countries but used them to attack their enemies. The reason is because they did not desire to put their soldiers and people in a dangerous situation. Japan contends that possessing such bombs is for "defensive purposes". But is this logic persuasive?

The Convention on the Prohibiting of Anti-Personnel Mines was adopted in 1997. Japan was initially cautious about signing the convention, but it later turned around its policy under (then) Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi's decision and signed it. Japan scrapped some one million land mines it had possessed until then, and since then has addressed the work of removing land mines in other countries. For this, Japan has won other countries' gratitude.

Cluster bombs, as well as land mines, are inhumane weapons that kill and wound ordinary people. It is contradictory to say that Japan may possess cluster bombs, even though it has scrapped all land mines. A supraparty parliamentary council to promote a ban on cluster bombs was established. The council is headed by Lower House Speaker Yohei Kono. It's high time for Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda to make a political decision to declare Japan's endorsement of a ban on cluster munitions. It is also a good opportunity for Japan, a country pursuing the ideal of disarmament, to earn international credit.

(4) Relationship between Japan-U.S. alliance and China uncertain

SANKEI (Page 15) (Abridged)
May 13, 2008

By Tadae Takubo, visiting professor at Kyorin University

I have no objection to regarding the Anglo-Japanese alliance as a masterpiece in Japanese diplomatic history. With the aim of countering the Russian Empire that began reaching out for the Korean Peninsula after effectively putting Manchuria under its control, Aritomo Yamagata, Taro Katsura, Takaaki Kato, Jutaro Komura and others decided that there was no other option but to join hands with Britain. They were farsighted. Although the Russian Empire was a common enemy, did Britain opt for teaming up with Japan because it had special feelings toward the Asian nation?

With no allies or countries on its side, Britain was suffering from isolation before the Russo-Japanese war.

From an anti-British standpoint, German Emperor William II launched an effort to enhance its naval force to counter the British Navy. Neither France nor Russia had any sympathy toward Britain. In order to defend its interests in China from Russia's southward policy, Britain perhaps did not have any other option but to align itself with Japan. Needless to say, the Anglo-Japanese alliance was not a marriage of love but a marriage of convenience.

Such frameworks as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty were launched with the aim of countering Russian military threats during the Cold War era. NATO's membership has been expanding to the east in the post-Cold War period. Without any common enemies, discussion is underway on the body's objectives.

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Kissinger's analysis

NATO's coverage area has expanded to include Afghanistan. There has been conflict between countries that have sent troops to relatively safe areas in Afghanistan and countries that are responsible for dangerous regions.

In contrast to NATO, there have been no major questions about the Japan-U.S. alliance in the post-Cold War era.

I recently read an interesting international analysis by former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. He predicts that the new U.S. administration to be launched next January will face the question of

how to distill a new international order from three simultaneous revolutions occurring around the globe. The three revolutions are: (1) the transformation of the traditional state system of Europe; (2) the radical Islamist challenge to historic notions of sovereignty; and (3) the drift of the center of gravity of international affairs from the Atlantic to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. He also notes that Asia will take the central political stage in the 21st century and that four Asian countries -- China, Japan, India, and in time, possibly Indonesia -- will become major players.

Kissinger, without presenting any ethical standards, also writes that maintaining the balance of power depends on how the United States and China act under such circumstances. We should also bear in mind the grim fact that Japan's fate depends on whether U.S.-China relations improve, deteriorate, or remain ambiguous.

In other words, the United States has the power of life and death of the international order in Asia of this century.

Despite the recent visit to Japan by Chinese President Hu Jintao, settling the question of developing gas fields in the East China Sea has been put off. An expansion of the development area would increase China's military presence to defend the territory. The announced figure for China's defense spending far exceeds that of Japan. Conventional wisdom has it that China's actual spending is twice to three times larger than what is announced. The balance of military power between Japan and China is now tilted in China's favor.

U.S. administration moving closer to China

I wonder how many Japanese lawmakers are alarmed at such a fact. Lamentably, many lawmakers readily decide to withdraw the Maritime Self-Defense Force troops from the Indian Ocean, though temporarily, possibly in view of the immediate political situation or in their own interests. Some other legislators are also saying, "Beijing has proposed improving relations with Tokyo, so we must not annoy China."

Although I do not think the Japan-U.S. alliance will collapse easily, the composition of the Japan-U.S. alliance vs. China is less than infallible. I think the Bush administration has moved closer to China, especially in its second term. In December 2005, then Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick encouraged China to become a responsible stakeholder. Since then, this phrase has often been used in official U.S. documents. On May 10, 2006, Zoellick before the U.S. House also opposed Taiwan's independence, saying: "Independence means war, and that means American soldiers."

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This can be taken as the President's statement and it overlaps with China's assertion, as well. An alliance is not a love affair.

(5) Editorial: Japan should urge Burmese junta to accept help following the deadly cyclone

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)
May 13, 2008

The extent of the damage caused by a giant cyclone that hit Burma (Myanmar) has finally begun to be reported to the outside of the nation. The situation there is far more catastrophic than anyone imagined. If no relief measures are taken, an increasing number of people will inevitably die from diarrhea or contagious diseases. Emergency assistance is urgently needed.

The ruling military junta announced that at least 32,000 people were dead and that up to 30,000 are still missing. But the United Nations (UN) estimates that the disaster caused 100,000 deaths at most and that 2 million people were affected by losing their homes and the like.

Reporters dispatched by foreign news companies, including the Asahi Shimbun, have begun to report on the situation in the ravaged areas.

There, the average temperature during the daytime is nearly 40 degrees, and clean drinking water and decent food are not available. The lives of the evacuees are totally miserable.

The military authorities were initially reluctant to receive international aid, but some of the aid materials have finally arrived in affected areas 10 days after the cyclone slammed into the nation. The U.S. military's aid-carrying first plane, which had been on standby, finally arrived in Yangon on May 12.

The UN World Food Program (WFP) has begun transporting relief supplies through the border with Thailand by truck. Humanitarian aid must be speedily delivered to the devastated areas.

But the relief goods being provided, the volunteers and equipment to distribute the goods, and those providing medical care are all insufficient. According to news reports, in seriously damaged areas, since people are scrambling for distributed rice and bread, relief goods have not reached the weak, including the elderly.

Despite such a situation, the military junta has continued to restrict UN and NGO staff from entering the nation, insisting that it will take care of distributing goods to affected areas by itself. Meanwhile, the junta forcibly carried out a referendum on a new constitution for the country.

The Burmese military government has found itself isolated internationally as a result of using force to suppress pro-democracy protests last year and has made only limited contacts with foreign countries. It is outrageous for the junta to remain inflexible despite this large scale humanitarian crisis. The international community must continue to press the junta to receive international aid.

Neighboring Thailand has already dispatched a special envoy to Burma. The European Union (EU) also plans to send European Committee members in charge of development and humanitarian aid. The

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Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will call an emergency foreign ministerial to confer on ways to persuade the junta to accept foreign aid and how to help with the aftermath.

The Japanese government should also take flexible action. In response to a request from the UN, the government has decided to announce plans to provide the nation with 1.1 billion yen worth of aid. Prime Minister Fukuda sent a letter to Head of State of Burma Than Shwe calling on his government to receive trained aid personnel. It might be desirable that the government, taking one step forward, will dispatch Foreign Minister Koumura and others to Burma and ASEAN countries to have them cooperate in convincing the junta to accept international help.

The government also should work on China, which has strong influence over Burma, to persuade that nation. Prime Minister Fukuda agreed with President Hu Jintao when he visited Japan recently on the view that Japan and China should assume a major responsibility to promote world peace and development. The two countries should make use of their strategic, mutually-beneficial relationship in dealing with the aftermath of cyclone-hit Burma.

This is a huge disaster for Asia. While cooperating with international agencies, Japan should play a more leading role.

DONOVAN